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A VILLAGE BELLE
BY PAULINE A. DOHN

BRUSH AND PENCIL

VOL. V

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DANIEL CHESTER FRENCH, SCULPTOR

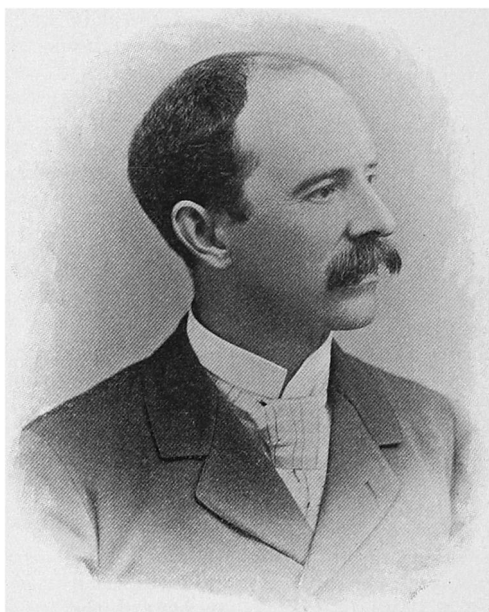
It is not probable that all of the philosophy of Concord will soon produce another such artist as Daniel Chester French; but it is safe to

say that we would not have had this refined personality in American art had it not been for the unusual surroundings of his youth. The boy's lot was indeed a fortunate one. Every influence of family and of environment was such as to develop his sensitive, poetic nature. His years have not been accentuated with notes of stress and hardship. His art is genial, sympathetic, and dignified. It expresses admirably his character.

Mr. French was born in Exeter, New Hampshire, April 20, 1850.

DANIEL CHESTER FRENCH

His parents, Henry Flagg and Anne (Richardson) French, were of substantial New England families, connected with those of Daniel Webster and J. G. Whittier. One of his grandfathers was chief justice, the other attorney-general, of New Hampshire, and his father was a lawyer, a judge, and assistant secretary of the United States treasury. His son writes of him:



"He was one of the founders of the public library at Exeter, and took the lead in planting the town with trees. His artistic instinct showed itself in a love of poetry and a taste for landscape gardening. He beautified every place in which he lived."

The family moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1860, to Amherst about 1865, and finally to Concord in 1867. Mr. W. M. R. French, the well-known director of the Chicago Art Institute, remarks playfully that "this was early enough for the Concord air to take effect upon brother Dan, but too late to save the rest of us! There were so many marked people here that my sister observed that 'at Concord she was extraordinary because she was ordinary.' Many of them have now disappeared; but my mother says 'Concord is like an extinct planet—it shines a good while after it has gone out.'"

It is a pretty story, the record of the boy's first interest in art, of the crude little figures which he worked upon with so much enthusiasm, and the encouragement which he received from sympathetic friends. I believe that the very first effort was a marvelous frog carved from a turnip. One of the neighbors to whose admiring gaze it was submitted was no other than the gentle author of "Little Women," Miss Louisa Alcott. She made the dreamy-eyed boy very proud by her commendation, and better yet, told him of a material more nearly suited to the sculptor's use than a raw turnip.

As some may remember, there was an artistic sister in the Alcott household. She chanced to have some modeling clay, which was kindly offered to the future sculptor. His brother has told me that he well remembers the day when the family horse was harnessed up and driven over for the precious material.

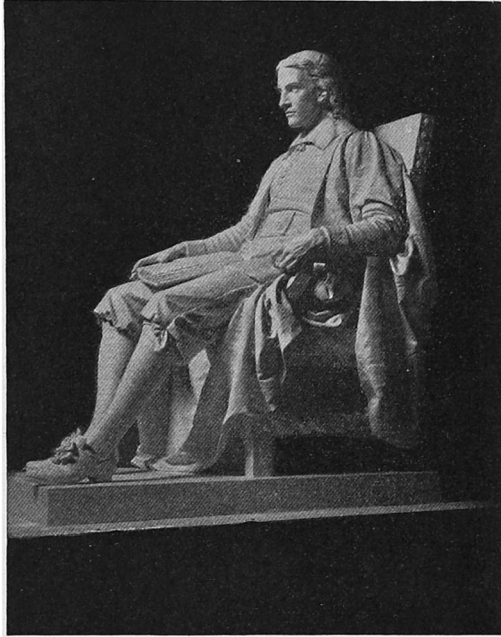
Now followed enthusiastic study, wild flights of fancy, and oftentimes the crushing defeats of childhood. The horizons of youth are so narrow, its moments of failure seem so final and so irrevocable! The most poetic natures do not always "yearn and yearn," however; they are sensible and wholesome. Daniel French did not begin with Venuses and Apollos; he delighted rather in modeling animals and birds. Best of these "archaic" works was an irresistible pair of lovesick owls, which has been reproduced in many lands. I remember, also, a Rogers-like Dolly Varden group, elaborated to the last degree. Now followed portraits, busts, and reliefs of members of the household and of accommodating neighbors. When nineteen years of age, Mr. French made a visit to relatives in Brooklyn, and had the good fortune to gain access to the studio of J. Q. A. Ward. Here he worked for a month, and began a lifelong friendship with that sturdy old veteran.

In 1870 he paid a visit to his brother in Chicago, who says that at this time he received his first paid order—for a bas-relief portrait of Mrs. Edwin Lee Brown, of this city. It was also in Chicago, in the old Crosby Opera House, that he made his first public exhibition—a bas-relief portrait of his sister Sarah.

Mr. French was but twenty-three years of age when he received his first important order, that for the "Minute Man." At this time he had had no schooling beyond the month in Ward's studio and the anatomy course of Dr. Rimmer, in Boston. There was no other instruction to be had! The commission was awarded the young aspirant at a public meeting of the citizens of Concord, at the town hall. Ralph Waldo Emerson presided; all praised the little sketch model offered; enthusiasm reigned, and the future sculptor saw the portals of fame opening to him.

It is interesting to note what this statue, so alert and so American in character, owes to its senior colleague, the Apollo Belvidere. You might never suspect it, but a large cast of the old-time god was Mr. French's sole model. With the exception of the left arm, the pose is almost identical. It speaks well for the untutored young artist that he was able to impress upon this, his very first work, so much of his own personality and so much of the spirit required that he completely concealed his classic model. How sensible and contained he was in it all one can best appreciate by contrasting this stern, tense embodiment of patriotism with the usual exuberant productions of beginners.

Upon the completion of this work, and even before its unveiling, Mr. French sailed for Europe, where he spent a year with Thomas Ball, for whose dignified art he has always expressed great regard. Excepting this brief study-time in Florence, our subject was self-trained, gaining a great amount of practice during the following years

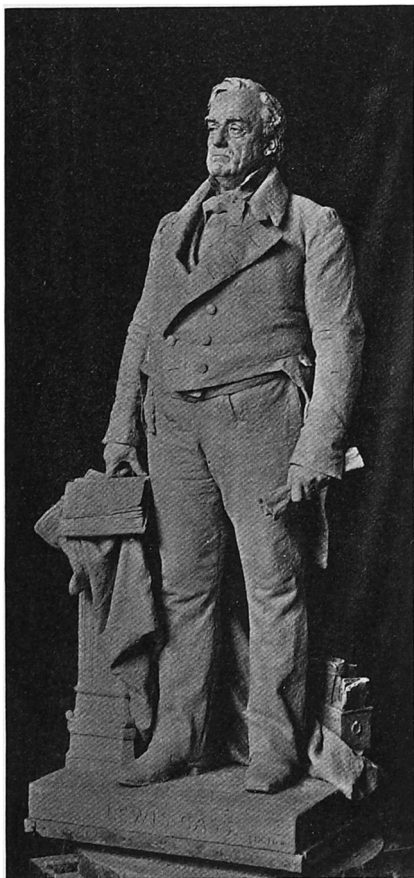


JOHN HARVARD, BY D. C. FRENCH
HARVARD UNIVERSITY, CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

in the execution of large decorative works for various public buildings. Among these were figures and pedimental groups for the St. Louis Custom-House, the Boston Postoffice, and the Philadelphia Courthouse.

The ideal-portrait statue of John Harvard at Harvard University was executed in 1882, and may be called the last of Mr. French's early works; at least from this point we find the suaver touch of a matured artist. The slight angularity, the uncompromising severity of this figure do not seem out of place in such a subject. One feels the Puritan inheritance in its very lines, yet the ascetic face is sweet and winning.

Mr. French's heads are invariably fine, intellectual, and commanding. His exceptional privilege of intimacy with the choicest spirits and noblest types of our country has given him a great advantage over many artists. It provides him a mental gallery, as it were, of all that is best. His portraits of Emerson and of Alcott are singularly delicate and appreciative studies. They bear the look of elevation which we attribute to such as climb the heights, yet are they gentle and intensely human. In his use of the portrait bust for monumental purposes, with subordinate decorative figures, as in the John Boyle O'Reilly memorial and the Richard M. Hunt memorial, he has solved with distinguished success the most difficult problem of modern sculpture. Thus we have the essential, the intellectual side of the man, with its personal inter-



LEWIS CASS, BY D. C. FRENCH
CAPITOL, WASHINGTON, D. C.

est, and there is an actual gain in concentration through the absence of the insistent details of coat and pantaloons, seams and buttonholes, shoes and shoestrings—things which you scarcely notice upon the living, moving man, but which fairly clamor for attention upon the surface of the petrified effigy.

In the summer of 1888 I found Mr. French in a little studio off the Rue Campagne-Première, in Paris, whither he had resorted to model his important statue of General Cass of Michigan, the marble of which now stands in the rotunda of the Capitol at Washington. Like a man who knows what he wants, and is not dazzled by the merely superficial, Mr. French was assimilating the best that is in modern Parisian art. He had not come too soon; his personality had long ago asserted itself, and had been strengthened by his fortunate opportunities for original work. Neither did he stay too long. He is, and ever will be, American to the core. But he learned there in that one piece of work, and during those few months of observation, what will influence and perfect everything which is to follow. Knowing just what he wanted, he got more in that brief period than most of us attained "over yonder" in years of immature strivings.

The Cass did not altogether suit some of the Frenchmen. He told me how M. Aizelin criticised its ponderous and solid pose—resting equally on its two legs. He smilingly added that the eminent sculptor evidently thought that he "knew no better." But like St. Gaudens with his Farragut, Mr. French had a sturdy subject to deal with, and selected the position best suited to reveal the character of the man. With all its solidity, the artist has so well treated the surface, has made the flesh so mellow and the drapery so crisp and full of color, that the figure easily takes its place among the best portrait statues of the country. It unites admirable characterization with no less attractive technique. The first quality the artist had already shown, the second was the result of the Parisian experience.

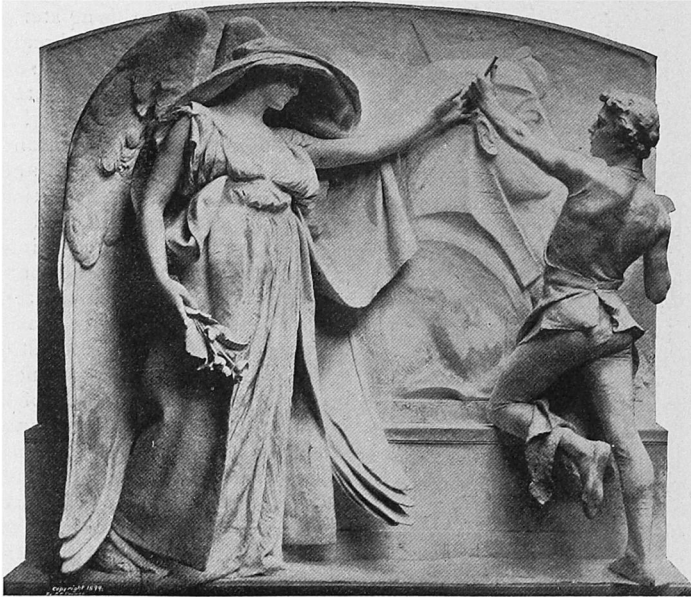
This statue is the only good thing in our "National Sculpture Gallery." Among those hard, conventional figures, it stands alone. It has an individuality, an equipoise, and a technical perfection undreamed of by the earlier generation of American sculptors. Comparing it with its fellows, one understands why all turn now to Paris instead of Rome or Florence. Men like Mead and Story and Rogers, who twenty years ago were our great sculptors, are now scarcely mentioned. It seems cruel; but it is nature's way—it is the "survival of the fittest." They had to give place to men like French and St. Gaudens and MacMonnies. There is progress in it.

From that day we have a succession of magnificent achievements. Subjects permitting of more poetic expression than the General Cass have since fallen to the sculptor. The next one of importance was, I believe, the Gallaudet group, of Washington, D. C., one of the most pleasing portrait monuments of our time. The famous teacher of the



GALLAUDET MONUMENT, BY D. C. FRENCH
WASHINGTON, D. C.

deaf and dumb is represented sitting in a chair, with a little girl of eight or ten years beside him. He bends toward her with a sympathetic smile; she, with outstretched hand, shapes a letter of the new language which he has given her. Her eyes look the gratitude of the little pent-up soul. The artist's conception is as beautiful as a strain of music. The execution of the group is no less perfect. The composition of line and mass is most successful, though novel. The sweep of the child's simple dress is happily employed; the straight little arm



DEATH AND THE SCULPTOR, BY D. C. FRENCH
THE CARBON STUDIO, NEW YORK
Copyright by D. C. French

redeems from overgraceful lines and concentrates attention upon itself, leading the eye back finally to the wistful, pleading face and to the gentle, reassuring smile of the teacher.

At the World's Fair, surrounded by the indecent extravagances of the Italian carvers and the clever plastic jokes of the Spanish modelers, the relief of "The Angel of Death and the Young Sculptor" rose superb—the expression of a self-respecting master of a noble art. In its presence I used to find myself involuntarily removing my hat. Putting aside the actual significance of the idea, which appeals to all, though so differently, we found in the handling of the Milmore

memorial some new and interesting features. The artist has attempted no portraiture. The young sculptor is not Milmore, though Mr. French was reminded, after the sphinx was introduced—and turned around and remodeled—that Milmore had actually carved some of these weird creatures for the Mount Auburn Cemetery.

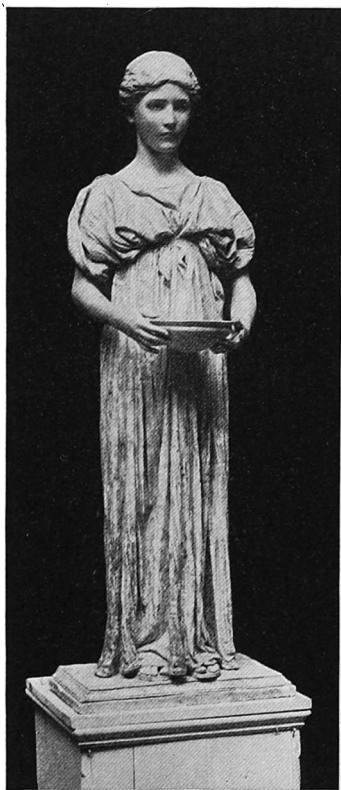


FIGURE FOR CHAPMAN MEMORIAL
AT MILWAUKEE, WIS.

In a way, the motif of the relief suggests Watts's "Love and Death"; but how much more beautiful and impressive this mysterious angel form than the grisly, threatening *something* which presses silent and irresistible upon the figure of Love in the famous painting! It is, to be sure, only a question of point of view. Mr. French's angel may be looked upon as a friend, even a benefactress; one of our eloquent ministers has so interpreted it in a suggestive sermon.

The manner in which the artist simplified and etherealized the face of the angel is very interesting. One feels firm modeling underneath it all, but a skillful blending of the forms avoids sharpness and angularity. The overshadowing mass of drapery cuts off all direct light, and shrouds the face in a dim half-tone. By these ingenious and happy devices the sculptor has succeeded to a remarkable degree in escaping the aggressive realism which spoils so many of the would-be ideal works of this period. This face has mystery; it is impressive and grand. It speaks to every imagination.

The universality of this appeal proves the greatness of the work; it is the highest tribute possible. All humankind, from the ignorant, the uncouth, the flippant, even, to the most refined and the most spiritual, show a quick flash of recognition when introduced to this truly great artist-thought. It stirs the sluggish, prosaic mind; it arrests the frivolous. It calms the work-weary and tempest-tossed; it is big enough in grasp for the philosopher and seer. Strange it sounds, to

speak of a gravestone as "popular," yet were the word not so abused by the companionship of the meretricious, it could well be employed in this connection. Photographs of this relief are to be seen in every picture store; they hang in thousands of homes. I have seen them in offices and upon the desks of business men. It is a splendid thing—a very great privilege—to be able to talk thus to one's countrymen. And to do it in a language so exalted, with an eloquence so sustained—how rare! Hovenden's "Home Ties" was dear to the multitude; Whistler's shadowy but soulless forms delight the painters; Mr. French's life and talent have vouchsafed a yet finer thing—a message of universal appeal in the form of a masterpiece of artistic rendering. This one work alone would insure Mr. French's immortality. Happy that other sculptor who died young and thereby saved his name to fame!

Yet another thought in this connection. A nation which appreciates such art as this, which delights in it and does it honor, is not inartistic by nature. The success of this group, of St. Gaudens's Shaw memorial, of Sargent's Prophets, proves that there is hope for a great art in this land.

Our people recognize and turn to the very best whenever it is offered.

To revert for a moment to the technical execution of the group, there is a great lesson for sculptors in the treatment of those magnificent wings. Their masterly simplicity was emphasized by the neighboring Italian angels at the World's Fair—and is no doubt in the



ANGEL OF LIFE, BY D. C. FRENCH
SKETCH IN CLAY

Boston cemetery as well. The Italians verily cannot stay the hand until every feather is ruffled into unrest. Feathers are hardly enough; they delight in marking even the striæ with a fine-toothed comb! Very different is Mr. French's treatment. Much is eliminated to



ANGEL, BY D. C. FRENCH

begin with; the great feathers are reduced to three or four. Then broad surfaces are left quite undisturbed or blended together into simple masses, with here and there an occasional accent. But this accent is quite enough—far more effective, indeed, than a monotonous teasing off the entire surface. It is interesting to recall at this point the fact that Mr. French devoted himself much to the study of ornithology in his youth. The good use to which he has put it confirms the wisdom of the thrifty New England habit of saving up all sorts of odds and ends which “may come handy some day.” The boyish enthusiasm for nature which led to a sympathetic study of flying creatures gave the future sculptor of angels a store of knowledge from which he draws constantly. It has “come handy.” Any artist can take a pigeon’s wing and make a careful copy of it; any good sculptor could modify and simplify this copy to his purpose. Any *could*, I say, but there is just one who does. He alone recognizes the full importance of that wing, and realizes that it must not be slurred and neglected. From vast experience he has evolved the typical wing, and it is his sign-manual upon every one of his creations of this character. Scores of sculptors make “pretty good” wings; Mr. French alone gives us the perfect epitome of a wing. There is no one living who has done it as well as he.

Other beautiful angels of later date from the hand of Mr. French are the little reliefs of kneeling figures decorating the Clarke monument, Forest Hills, Boston; the splendid creation for the White memorial, also in Forest Hills Cemetery, and the dreamy little vase-bearer of the Chapman memorial in Milwaukee, which is shown without wings in our illustration.

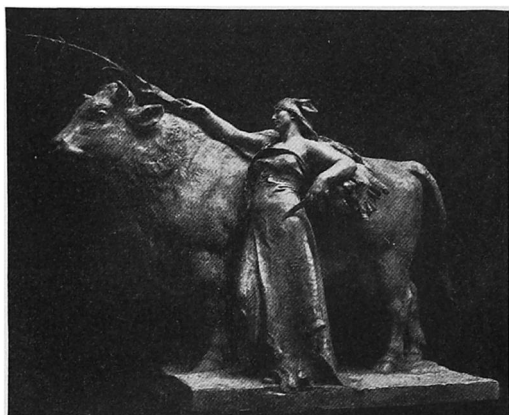
This may not be an inappropriate place to introduce another source of Mr. French’s inspiration. In 1888 he married Miss Mary Adams French, of Washington, D. C., and established his residence in New York. He is a “home-body,” preferring the companionship of his charming wife and little girl to outside attractions, and uniting studio and house as closely as possible.

Resuming the catalogue of Mr. French's works, we turn again to the Columbian Exposition, where amid the endless array of sculptural decorations the work of this masterful artist stood preëminent. It is unnecessary to explain that this was not alone because of the enormous size of the figure of the Republic. That crowning feature of the

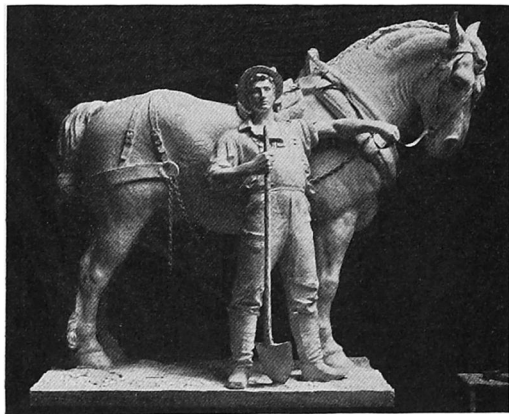
Fair was more than a big figure; it was a great one. Many did not like her, but that was their misfortune; it was not his problem to make a merely pretty composition. He took his commission more seriously. His the task to represent something more enduring than the Exposition. He realized, too, that his statue was to enter into an architectural scheme of classic spirit. The Republic was to be seen from a distance, in connection with those buildings; it must be a monument as well as a statue. Hence its symmetry and balance. Hence

the straight, severe lines of the lower portion of the figure. Its archaic severity was not accidental. The artist studied long on his problem, until the monument stood reduced to its last terms, a triumph of artistic achievement.

How its long lines and broad masses insist upon leading the eye up to the arms and head, until they



INDIAN WOMAN AND BULL
COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION



FARMER AND HORSE
COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION

rest upon the stern, sweet face! No doubt Mr. French could have made her as graceful as a Hebe, as "squirmful" even as Bernini's contorted divinities, but he knew better.

Also of this time were those first important collaborations with E. C. Potter, the eminent sculptor of animals, a former pupil of Mr. French. Every one remembers the splendid Columbus Quadriga which crowned the so-called Peristyle, and those most successful decorative groups of the Court of Honor, the Teamster, the Farmer, the Indian Girl, and others, united with Mr. Potter's great creations, the horse, the bull, the buffalo, etc.

The success of the Milmore memorial brought now from Boston a second order of similar character, that for the John Boyle O'Reilly monument. I have not seen the finished work, which is said to be most happily situated in the Back Bay Fens, but it was my privilege to see the completed model in New York in 1895. A short account of the visit, prepared at the time for the *Baltimore Sun*, will give the writer's first impressions of this fine group. I take the liberty of quoting from myself here as elsewhere without quotation marks.

Upon this occasion, after a little talk about mutual friends, Mr. French suggested, as though it had just occurred to him, that perhaps we would like to look into his studio. "Perhaps!" He must have known all the time that we were aching to do so, and would go away quite inconsolable if we were not vouchsafed a glimpse of his work.

He drew aside a curtain, and we stepped out upon a little balcony, whence a staircase led down into a great skylighted room. We paused a moment to take in the unusual scene. From such a point of observation a sculptor's workshop, so well lighted and with its picturesque white masses here and there, makes an interesting picture. On beyond, wide doorways opened into further ample rooms.

Descending the stairs, we tried to look at everything at once. There was one central object, however, upon which our attention was soon riveted.

The turn-table was swung around, and we were looking at the great work which has occupied the sculptor for the last two years, the O'Reilly memorial. It will certainly add to Mr. French's reputation, for it is magnificent. The scheme is primarily a massive stone of Celtic design, against one side of which is placed a bust of the poet; on the other side is to be the bronze group of which we now saw the clay model.

The idea of the group is not a complex one—the day for that sort of thing has gone by—but in its very simplicity it lends itself to the purpose. The figure of Erin, a presence of rare beauty, sits twining in mournful pride a wreath of laurel. She is supported on the one hand by the personification of Patriotism and on the other by Poesy. They do not sit there upright and politely unconscious of each other, like

well-bred strangers, and like nine-tenths of the monumental groups of our time, but they are closely bound together in thought and in composition. The subordinate figures are shown as supplying the material of the wreath and following its growth with sympathetic interest. And they are beautiful, these figures! While essentially



JOHN BOYLE O'REILLY MEMORIAL, BY D. C. FRENCH
BOSTON, MASS.

new in conception, the Erin reminded me of Paul Dubois's "Charity" in treatment, and, lacking a picture to illustrate, the Patriotism might be likened to the "Military Courage," from the same skillful hand. Not that Mr. French's figures suggest in any way plagiarism, but they share the great qualities of these well-known and ever admirable statues. I do not see wherein they fall one whit behind them. What more can I say?

Poesy is represented as a tender youth, nearly nude, of spiritual type, most fair. With outstretched hand he offers leaves for the wreath.

There is nothing theatrical in the composition; all is calm and reverent. Yet there is an undercurrent of exultation, it seemed to me—a service of pride as well as of sorrow. Erin rejoices in the memory of her gifted son even while she mourns her loss.

There are certain great qualities which we always expect in the work of Daniel French, which might, however, escape the unpracticed eye of the nonprofessional—the sculptural compactness which he has given to the group as a whole, and the ‘color’ or play of light and



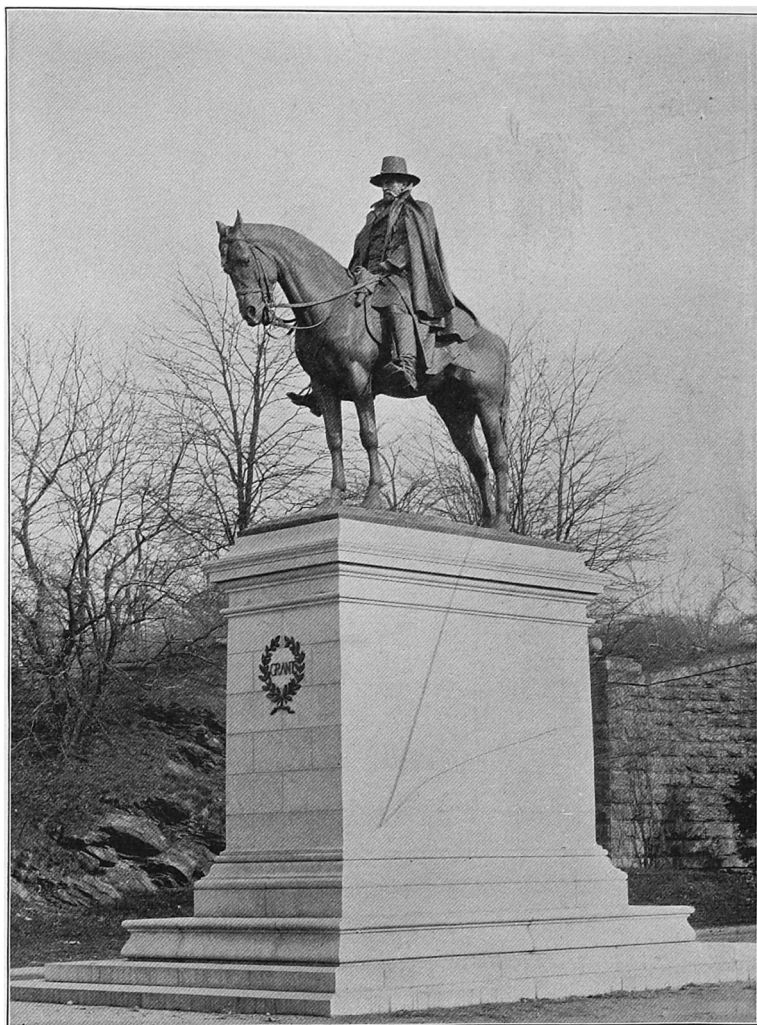
HEAD OF ANGEL

shade with which he has enlivened these surfaces. The apparently unstudied swerve of the figures has been most delicately planned to produce undulation, advance, and retreat of masses. Wonderful art that conceals art!

I am tempted to add the paragraph which followed, because it gives a good idea of Mr. French's methods and of the often unheralded heroism which an artist of conscience is sometimes called upon to exercise. Mr. French works without haste, yet achieves rapidly. There is always time to do the right thing. “A certain sustained power is characteristic,” writes his brother; “he does not hesitate, and does not

become disgusted with his own work and tear it down.” It comes down, however, just the same, if making it right requires it, as the following incident reveals:

“To most visitors the group of a year ago was just as good as it is in its present form. But Mr. French is working for the ‘higher criticism.’ I fancy that there is always present in his mind a kind of subconsciousness of his brother artists, St. Gaudens, Warner, et al., and of the big Frenchmen. So his work must be done just as well as he can make it, and consequently when there came to him a twelvemonth ago the idea of a better pose for the middle figure, the fair lady was ruthlessly dethroned, and her successor, almost identical, but better, was begun. No great difference, but to the artist all the difference in the world. Next Patriotism suffered, or enjoyed, the same fate. Mr. French remarked, with a playfully mournful smile, ‘I am just where I was last May—one year swept right out of my life.’ But methought he bore the martyr's crown right jauntily, and felt within himself that the year had paid.”



STATUE OF GEN. GRANT, BY D. C. FRENCH
FAIRMOUNT PARK, PHILADELPHIA, PA.



MEMORIAL ANGEL, SCULPTURE
FOR A MONUMENT IN FOREST HILLS CEMETERY, BOSTON, MASS.
DANIEL CHESTER FRENCH

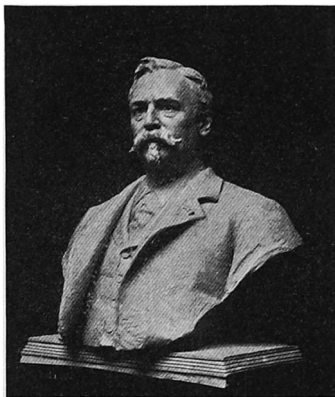
In portraiture, the Starr King monument for San Francisco was followed by the Rufus Choate for Boston, and two figures for the Congressional Library, "History" and "Herodotus," enabled the sculptor to show his skill in decorative work on more classic lines.

On the 27th of last April the Grant monument was unveiled in Fairmount Park, Philadelphia, with great éclat. This joint product of the skill of Messrs. French and Potter has received high praise from all sides. The cut shows a quiet and impressive group. (If the printer should make this read "impassive," it will perhaps do as well.) The base, as shown in our illustration, bears but one word, "Grant," and is admirable in its simplicity of mass and line.

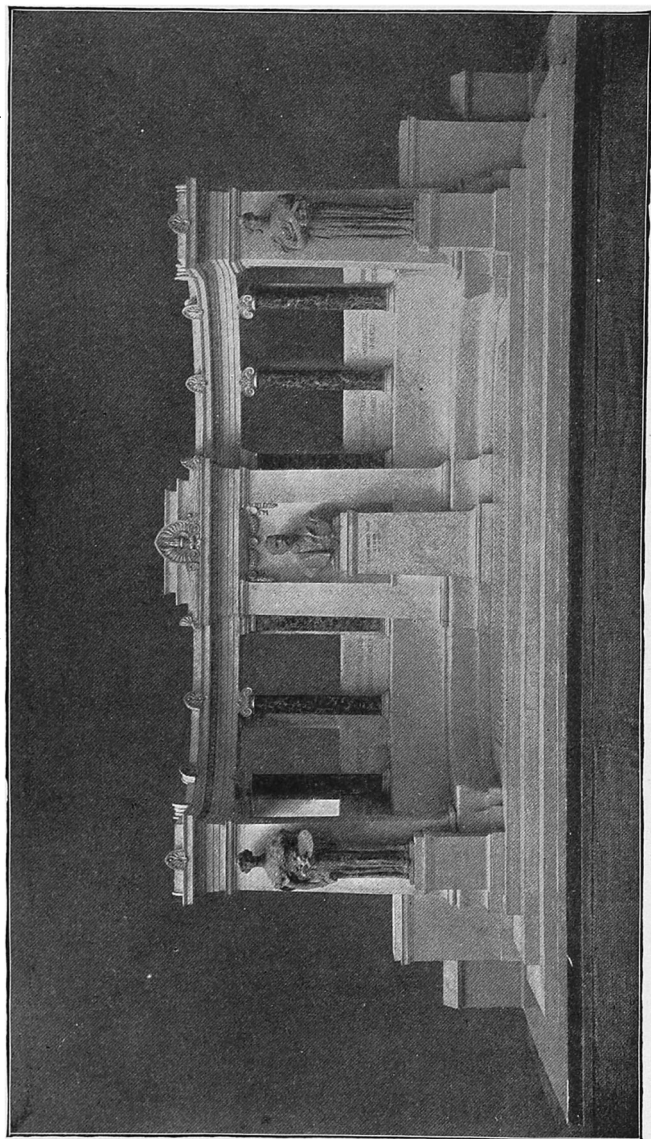
A work destined to even greater honors is the equestrian Washington, now being cast in bronze by the Henry Bonnard foundry. This group is a gift of Americans to France. The site of the bronze has not yet been located in Paris, but the plaster will have a magnificent setting in front of the United States building at the exposition of 1900. The sculptors feel that they have done their best. "It will be the finest horse ever modeled in this country," says Mr. French of the work of his colleague. I presume that Mr. Potter is equally enthusiastic over Mr. French's Washington. I am impatient to see this great work, but upon a recent visit to New York could only look down upon the outside of the mould, deep sunken in the foundry-pit. It was tantalizing.

This visit, a few weeks back, gave me the privilege of another glimpse of Mr. French, a glimpse of several hours' duration. He is one of the most genial and gentle of men, and the traditional wit of his family, which some of us know so well, crops out very frequently. On the jury, when baffled for a moment, he would throw up his hands in feigned despair, and plead laughingly that he "didn't know anything about sculpture, anyway." I believe he half meant it, too, but where, oh, where, does it put us little fellows!

Mr. French's present works, aside from the Washington, are the remaining figure of the Hunt memorial, the bronze doors of the Boston Public Library,—beautiful low reliefs,—a statue of Governor Pillsbury, of Minnesota, and a number of large decorative figures for the Minnesota State House. I presume I have omitted something, but



RICHARD M. HUNT, BY D. C. FRENCH
FOR HUNT MEMORIAL



HUNT MEMORIAL
SCULPTURE BY D. C. FRENCH
CENTRAL PARK, NEW YORK CITY

this list is enough to show that the sculptor has his hands full. I am glad of it. Every one of us rejoices in Mr. French's prosperity. It means just that much more good art in our country. We need more men like Mr. French—men of character and of culture; men of ideas and of sympathy with all that is beautiful and good. Long life and a full one to Daniel C. French!

LORADO TAFT.



THE STATUE OF THE REPUBLIC

(IN THE COURT OF HONOR, CHICAGO)

Engirt with dreamful beauty thou didst stand,
 By day and night illumined, and thy feet
 The gathered nations thronged with homage sweet,—
 The world's hope shining in thine outstretched hand.
 The nations left thee there upon the strand
 To isolation splendid and complete;
 The flames rose round thee with their withering heat,
 And touched thy flashing beauty to a brand.
 Yet still unscathed thy spirit could not die,—
 And o'er the land thy rising genius leads
 And summons all to freedom and the sky;
 Like thine own eagle that no respite needs,
 But sunward mounts with ever clearer eye,
 Thou dost persuade to high and higher deeds.

HORACE SPENCER FISKE.